

Lithuania Considers Delaying Full Independence

President Says Soviets View 2-Year Freeze as a Basis for Talks

By BILL KELLER

Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, April 20 — As the Kremlin tightened its economic squeeze on Lithuania today, the President of the republic said his government would consider a moratorium on full independence as part of a deal with Moscow.

President Vytautas Landsbergis said in a telephone interview tonight that Moscow had floated a proposal to suspend Lithuania's declaration of statehood for two years as the basis for negotiations.

While the Lithuanians contemplated concessions, Moscow reportedly extended its economic embargo of the rebellious republic by curtailing deliveries of metals, wood, tires and sugar and by scuttling joint-venture investments planned there by three Japanese companies. Soviet troops also tried to seize a printing plant in the capital, Vilnius.

No Plans to Submit

Mr. Landsbergis said that the republic would not agree to revert to the authority of the Soviet Constitution, but that a freeze on putting Lithuania's independence declaration fully into effect could form part of a compromise.

"If somebody authorized by Moscow to negotiate presented us with a package of proposals including this, we could have a discussion," he said.

It was not clear how such a proposal would resolve the diametrically opposed claims to sovereignty over Lithuania. But the discussion of a freeze was the most dramatic of several signs that the search for a compromise was intensifying.

A Call for Retractions

The republic's Deputy Prime Minister, Algirdas Brazauskas, called on the Lithuanian Parliament today to retract some of the more defiant measures that it has enacted since declaring independence.

Mr. Brazauskas, the leader of the breakaway Lithuanian Communist Party and still one of the most popular figures in the independence government, said that independence itself was not negotiable. But he said the republic should relent on its decision to boycott



Associated Press

Soviet troops tried to seize a printing plant yesterday in Vilnius, Lithuania, after curtailing deliveries of metals, wood, tires and sugar. Soldiers dragged away a Lithuanian guard from the printing house.

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the Soviet military's spring draft and other measures.

"The price of independence must have its limits," said Mr. Brazauskas, the chairman of a new commission set up to cope with Moscow's cutoff of oil and sharp reduction of gas supplies to the republic.

Despite the introduction of strict rationing, officials predicted that Lithuania would face a serious energy crisis in two weeks if Moscow continued to withhold oil and gas supplies. They said the republic did not have enough foreign currency to purchase even one day's oil needs from abroad.

Troops Battle Workers

Lithuanian officials said tensions flared today when Soviet troops tried to seize the printing plant in Vilnius, beating workers who resisted the move as a crowd of onlookers jeered "Fascists! Fascists!" at the soldiers.

It was the most violent clash to date in Moscow's campaign to force Lithuania to renounce its claim of independence. Zigmantas Vaisvila, an independence campaigner elected to both the Lithuanian and Soviet Parliaments, was among those roughed up when about 50 soldiers tried to wrest control of the printing plant from the workers.

This week Moscow announced the cutoff of oil to Lithuania's only refinery at Mazeikiai. It shut off three of four natural-gas pipelines supplying the republic, reducing flows from 18 million to 3.5 million cubic meters a day.

Street lights were dimmed and home gas supplies were restricted to conserve fuel. Commuters left their cars at home rather than use gasoline, which was also being rationed.

The Lithuanian Minister of Energy, Leonas Asmantas, said in a telephone interview that the republic had cut off oil and gas to Soviet military installations on its territory and had sharply reduced supplies to industrial enterprises belonging to central ministries in Moscow.



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Fracas at Vilnius printing plant was the most violent incident in Lithuania's independence drive.

The enterprises "are feeling the restrictions," he said. "We tell them: 'Ask Moscow. You work for Moscow.'"

Mr. Asmantas said the republic would face serious disruptions in about two weeks. "We will probably shut down some enterprises," he said. "Transport will be sharply reduced."

A new commission on energy supplies, chaired by Mr. Brazauskas, has begun to set priorities for allotting energy, with farmers receiving 60 to 70 percent of their usual supplies, public transit 70 percent, food transport 90 percent and garbage collection 80 percent.

Moscow has banned foreigners from the republic. A small group of Western reporters escorted to Vilnius on Thursday by the Soviet Foreign Ministry reported that the city's residents were irritated by long gasoline lines but that they were not panicking.

The comments by Mr. Brazauskas, however, reflected a growing sense that public opinion may turn against Lithuania's leadership unless it takes steps to halt Moscow's sanctions and intimidation.

In a 90-minute presentation to the Parliament today, he warned that "it

would be impossible" for Lithuania to live with an extended economic blockade.

He said that Lithuania had about \$500,000 in foreign currency reserves. Even if it could find sellers willing to risk Moscow's anger, he said, it would cost \$5 million a day to meet its normal energy needs by buying abroad.

Rumors have been circulating in Lithuania that a Lithuanian delegation bound for talks in Moscow next week will offer a two-year freeze on independence in exchange for a commitment by Moscow to honor the republic's secession.

Mr. Landsbergis said tonight that the idea of a freeze originated with Moscow. "We have received hints that this would be acceptable to Moscow, that this could lead to negotiations," he said in the interview. "But that is impossible, because a moratorium on our Constitution would mean a voluntary retreat to the Soviet Constitution."

Mr. Landsbergis said that Lithuania would not accede to a deal that accepted Moscow's sovereignty, which was imposed by forcible annexation in

1940. There is no sign that Moscow will withdraw its claim, he added.

One possible resolution might be delaying the effects of independence in what Moscow would call a moratorium and Lithuania would call a transition.

Bush to Talk With Allies

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ORLANDO, Fla., April 20 — The White House said today that President Bush would consult with allies and with Congressional leaders to discuss possible courses of action against the Soviet Union because of its moves in Lithuania, but that no measures would be announced until early next week.

"We are increasingly concerned by news reports today of an economic crackdown in Lithuania," the White House spokesman, Marlin Fitzwater, said as the President was leaving a political fund-raiser in Birmingham, Ala., for another appearance in Orlando. "Although our information is sketchy, we are disturbed that this signals another unfortunate step in the pressure being brought to bear on Lithuania by the Soviet Union."

Baker and Soviets Confer on Strategic Arms

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WASHINGTON, April 20 — Two senior Soviet officials met with Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d today and suggested some new ideas on strategic arms, Administration officials said.

A senior Administration official described the negotiating session, which was held on short notice at the behest of Moscow, as "productive."

The American official said the discussions, with Viktor Karpov, a senior Soviet arms control official, and Col. Gen. Branislav Omelichev, first deputy director of the Soviet General Staff, included possible compromises on limiting air-launched and sea-launched cruise missiles, two issues holding up completion of a strategic arms treaty.

Another senior official said that while the Soviets' new ideas on cruise missiles resulted in some movement, the meetings today did not resolve all differences over the weapons.

The meeting suggested that Moscow and Washington were trying not to allow the situation in Lithuania to disrupt American-Soviet relations and the push for new arms accords.

The arms control discussions held earlier this month between Mr. Baker and Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze went poorly, and today's session appeared to be an effort to put things back on track before the summit meeting scheduled for May 30 between President Bush and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.